Application: Michigan Statewide Advocacy Services Knowledge Base Project

Michigan Statewide Advocacy Services
Administration of Justice Grant Program

Summary

ID: AOJ2026--0000000088

Administration of Justice Grant Application

Completed - May 5 2026

Administration of Justice Grant Application

Organizational Overview

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1. Describe how you learned of this grant opportunity:

Michigan Statewide Advocacy Services (MSAS) is a long-time annual grantee of the Michigan State Bar Foundation and its programs, including the Michigan Poverty Law Program, Michigan Legal Help, and the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, have received AOJ funding in the past.

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2. If you are not an annual grantee of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, please briefly describe your organization's mission:

MSAS is a nonprofit organization that serves low-income individuals and families as well as lawyers and other advocates in Michigan.

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3. If you are not an annual grantee of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, please briefly describe your organization's history:

The Michigan Poverty Law Program was created by Legal Services of South Central Michigan in 1997 in response to state and federal efforts to reorganize legal services. Other statewide programs followed suit in the next few years, including the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, Michigan Legal Help, and the Michigan Elder Justice Initiative. In 2014, LSSCM changed its name to the Michigan Advocacy Program and created a separate LLC to house its statewide services - Michigan Statewide Advocacy Services.

4. If you are not an annual grantee of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, please briefly describe your organization's major achievements:

MSAS has a long history of providing critical services to communities and professionals through its four statewide programs.

5. List the dates, purposes and outcomes of any prior applications for Michigan State Bar Foundation funds submitted within the last six years. (Date, Title of Project/Purpose, Approved/Denied/Pending)

(No response)

Project Overview

1. Title of project:

Statewide Knowledge Base Project - Phase 1

2. Amount Requested:

$ 247425

3. Anticipated beginning date (mm/dd/yyyy):

07/01/2026

4. Anticipated completion date (mm/dd/yyyy):

12/31/2026

5. In 125 words or less, describe a brief summary of the grant request covering the needs to be addressed, methods, target audience and anticipated outcomes.

Michigan legal aid programs do not currently have one single source of knowledge to look to when looking for answers to commonly asked questions, templates for briefs and memos, or other areas of knowledge. Information exists in multiple places, including internally at each organization and through the Counsel and Advocacy Law Line wiki, the Michigan Poverty Law Program website, and Michigan Legal Help. The first phase of this project will engage a consultant to help lay the groundwork for an AI-powered knowledge base that would be a single source of information that legal aid programs can use to ensure that they have accurate, updated information and templates. The ultimate outcome of the project will be more effective and efficient legal aid organizations.

6. List names/titles and describe the qualifications of key staff members or volunteers responsible for the project.

	Name/Title of Key Staff or Volunteer	Function/Qualifications
1	Lorray Brown	Executive Director, MSAS; Long-time leader of MSAS, acknowledged across Michigan as a leader in legal services and poverty law
2	Consultant - TBD	Work with MSAS to understand the key stakeholders and work on the design and concept of a statewide knowledge base; Consultant will have experience with legal aid organizations and, ideally, will have experience specifically with statewide knowledge base projects
3		
4		

7. Describe how this project furthers the mission of your organization

MSAS's mission is to serve both community members and legal aid lawyers and advocates across Michigan. This project will begin the process of creating a statewide knowledge base that will provide accurate, up-to-date information and knowledge to legal aid organizations and advocates in Michigan, which will in turn allow them to provide the best possible legal services to low-income individuals and families across the state.

8. Describe how this project advances the stated priorities of the Michigan State Bar Foundation

This project fits squarely into the stated priorities of the Michigan State Bar Foundation. Building and implementing a statewide knowledge base is an innovative approach to sharing information with legal aid providers across the state. As far as we are aware, there is only one similar project to this one (in Texas), which would keep Michigan on the cutting edge when it comes to collaboration among legal aid providers. Legal aid programs across the state will be highly supportive of this project because it will minimize the amount of time that their staff spend looking for information in different places and verifying its accuracy (see support letter from the Legal Services Association of Michigan).

9. What will happen to this project if the Michigan State Bar Foundation denies the grant request?

There are few funding sources that allow for a concept phase or are willing to provide funding for a consultant to help design a project. The Michigan State Bar Foundation understands the need for a consultant phase for a project of this magnitude. Without its support, it is unlikely that MSAS will be able to find another funder willing to grant the funds needed to accomplish this project.

Needs to be Addressed

1. What are the needs to be addressed?

The fundamental need addressed by this application is the lack of a comprehensive, institutional statewide legal knowledge base in Michigan. Currently, each legal aid office across Michigan uses a variety of knowledge sources to understand legal information and serve their clients, and the information provided by these sources can vary based on the author and the time they were last updated. There is no one place for attorneys to go to ensure that they are getting the most updated legal information from the foremost experts in common substantive areas in the state such as housing, family law, healthcare access, benefits, and consumer protection.

2. What is the target audience?

The target audience for this project will be legal aid organizations across Michigan. Once the project is implemented, the resources gained by legal aid staff will be used to serve low-income individuals and families throughout the state.

3. What outreach will be undertaken to inform the audience of this project?

There are multiple gatherings of Michigan legal aid organizations that can be used to provide information about this project. These include the biweekly CALL partners meetings and regular meetings of the State Planning Body and the Legal Services Association of Michigan, as well as other ad hoc meetings and gathering opportunities.

4. List the counties in which services will be provided or indicate statewide.

Statewide

Project Activities

1. How many people will be served?

400 (legal aid attorneys)

2. Described any services in this project that will be provided by pro bono attorneys.

This project will not use pro bono attorneys.

3. Describe any services to be done by other volunteers.

This project will not use volunteers.

4. Describe the timeline for major activities in this project.

Create and distribute RFP for project consultant: by June 1, 2026

Choose consultant and enter into contract: by July 1, 2026

Begin work with consultant: by July 8, 2026

Receive final report from consultant outlining concept and design for knowledge base: by December 31, 2026

5. Describe any technology used to undertake this project.

This stage of the project is not expected to use specific technology. MSAS will work with the consultant to consider the technology platform that will host the knowledge base as the project moves into the implementation phase. We expect that the knowledge base project will harness the power of AI to streamline information and updates.

6. Describe supervision for the project.

The project will be supervised by Lorray Brown, Executive Director of MSAS. She will work directly with the consultant, bringing in other MSAS, MAP, and legal aid organization staff as needed throughout the first phase.

7. If applicable, list up to three materials that will result from this project.

This phase of the project will result in a recommendation from the consultant on the concept of a knowledge base. Once fully completed, the project will result in a knowledge base that can be used by legal aid organizations throughout Michigan.

8. If applicable, how many people will be served? Complete chart below. (Enter numbers without punctuation: 1000 rather than 1,000.00)

Type of legal problem	Cases closed after limited service	Cases closed after extended service	Total projected cases closed
Consumer/finance			
Education			
Employment			
Family			
Juvenile			
Health			
Housing			
Income maintenance			
Individual rights			
Other*			
Total Cases	0	0	0

Collaboration/Coordination

1. Describe the support this project has from other individuals or organizations in your community.

	Organization/Individual	Describe Support	Upload Letter of Support
1	Legal Services Association of Michigan (LSAM)	LSAM is a coalition of Michigan legal aid organizations, who will be the beneficiaries of the project. LSAM strongly supports this project, which will lead to more effective and efficient services delivery.	✔
2			✖
3			✖
4			✖
5			✖

2. If other organizations in your area perform services or meet needs in a way similar to those you have proposed, describe how your proposed project avoids duplication with other organizations.

Currently, legal aid organizations rely on a combination of sources for legal knowledge. This can include internal information and materials at each organization, the Counsel and Advocacy Law Line (CALL) wiki, and MPLP's online and in-person support resources. Because there is currently no coordination of these resources, there can be differences depending on when a certain document or page was updated or if there are divergent interpretations of a legal issue.

The idea of a statewide knowledge base is new in Michigan, and the idea of hiring a consultant to conceptualize a project has not been done. The goal of this project is an all-encompassing information source that can be shared by all legal aid organizations, a concept that has never been attempted before in Michigan.

3. Describe how you will coordinate activities with other organizations.

MSAS will work with Michigan legal aid organizations throughout this project to ensure that the knowledge base is meeting the needs of the organizations. MSAS and the consultant will engage regularly with LSAM, as well as with individual organizations as needed. Two organizations that will be especially integral to the project are the Michigan Poverty Law Program, which currently maintains a wealth of legal knowledge for Michigan attorneys, and Lakeshore Legal Aid, which houses CALL and its wiki.

4. Have you researched and utilized the information from other similar projects in developing this project? If so, describe.

Both Lorray Brown and Program Director of the Michigan Poverty Law Program Libby Benton participate in the Stanford Knowledge Base power group monthly meetings, which are attended by people in charge of managing and improving content for legal help websites, state support services, legal aid organizations, and state court websites. At these meetings, people share what is and isn't working as they think about developing knowledge bases. Lorray and Libby will continue attending these meetings and bring knowledge and information gained to the process. As far as we know, based on information from these meetings, a comprehensive statewide knowledge base project like the one proposed here is only being pursued by one state - Texas. The organization overseeing that project, Lonestar Legal Aid. Lessons from Texas will be taken into account throughout the Michigan project.

Evaluation of Project

1. List three anticipated outcomes of the project.

1	A comprehensive concept and design for a knowledge base at the end of phase one (the consultant process)
2	A comprehensive, regularly updated AI-powered knowledge base shared by all legal aid organizations in Michigan at the end of phase two (the implementation process)
3	Legal aid organizations reporting that they are able to work more effectively and efficiently with the new knowledge base (post-implementation)

2. Describe how you will evaluate the effectiveness of the project and include how you will measure the number of people impacted.

MSAS will liaise regularly with LSAM and its member legal aid organizations throughout the process to ensure that they have a voice in the creation of the concept of the knowledge base. While there will not be a specific number of people impacted in the first phase, MSAS will consider all case handling staff at legal aid organizations to have been impacted once the knowledge base is implemented.

3. Describe to whom dissemination of project information or results will be made and how such dissemination will occur.

The report from the consultant will be shared with stakeholders including the Michigan State Bar Foundation and potentially legal aid organizations as the project moves into the implementation phase. Once implementation of the knowledge base is complete, we will ensure that all legal aid organizations and staff are provided materials and trained on how to use it.

4. If this project can be replicated, describe the ways you will assist others in the process.

This project will be able to be replicated by other states looking to do similar statewide knowledge base projects. MSAS will convey its successes and obstacles with the Stanford Knowledge base power group, and staff will be happy to speak to others looking to embark on a similar process in the future.

Administration of Justice Grant Financial Information

Completed - May 5 2026

Form for "Administration of Justice Grant Financial Information

1. Describe how the project will be funded after these grant funds are spent.

MSAS is hopeful that this AOJ grant will be continued to account for the implementation phase as the knowledge base is built.

2. Describe any matching funds requirements from other sources for this project.

(No response)

3. Complete the chart below to reflect the project's estimated budget detailed by major line items. Include only what you are requesting for this project under the MSBF funds column. (Enter numbers without punctuation – for example, 1000 rather than $1,000.00. In addition, you will need to manually total rows, but columns will total)

Category	MSBF Funds	Other Funds	In-kind Support	Total
Personnel - Existing	37118			37118
Personnel - New				
Employee benefits	8166			8166
Consultant fees	200000			200000
Travel				
Space	300			300
Equipment				
Supplies				
Telephone	48			48
Postage				
Printing/copies				
Audit				
Other	1793			1793
Total	247425.0	0	0	247425.0

4. Please describe the personnel costs above, including positions, whether or not it is a new position and projected percentage of time that the staff will spend on this project.

The personnel cost in the budget above covers 20% of MSAS Executive Director Lorray Brown's time.

5. If you requested funding for consultant fees, space, equipment or other expenses, please describe.

As detailed in the application, MSAS is requesting up to $200,000 for a consultant to provide assistance with the conceptual design of the knowledge base. Space is charged at $1,500/six months at 20% of an FTE. Telephone costs for Ring Central total $480/year- $40/month- at 20% of an FTE for 6 months. Other costs include Library, insurance, dues and administration. Library is LexisNexis is total $960/year- $80/month- at 20% of an FTE for 6 months.Insurance is our professional liability insurance at $350/year for 20% of an FTE. Dues are Michigan bar dues at $450/year for 20% of an FTE. Administration includes payroll, accounting, HR, IT services, etc and is charged at $15,000/staff at 20% of an FTE for 6 months.

6. Please list any funding sources that have changed in the last year, including source of funding and amount.

(No response)

7. List the other anticipated funding sources for this project by name and amount.

	Source	Amount Requested	Amount Committed
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

8. Comments

Please add any comments you wish to provide.

(No response)